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U.S. Department of Justice

Immigration and Naturalization Service

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OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE APPEALS
425 Eye Street N.W.
ULLB, 3rd Floor
Washington, D.C. 20536

File: WAC-99-070-52497

Office: California Service Center

Date: MAY 01 2002

IN RE: Petitioner:
Beneficiary:

Petition: Petition for Special Immigrant Religious Worker Pursuant to Section 203(b)(4) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the "Act"), 8 U.S.C. 1153(b)(4), as described at Section 101(a)(27)(C) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(27)(C)

IN BEHALF OF PETITIONER:

Public Copy

INSTRUCTIONS:

This is the decision in your case. All documents have been returned to the office which originally decided your case. Any further inquiry must be made to that office.

If you believe the law was inappropriately applied or the analysis used in reaching the decision was inconsistent with the information provided or with precedent decisions, you may file a motion to reconsider. Such a motion must state the reasons for reconsideration and be supported by any pertinent precedent decisions. Any motion to reconsider must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider, as required under 8 C.F.R. 103.5(a)(1)(i).

If you have new or additional information which you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reopen. Such a motion must state the new facts to be proved at the reopened proceeding and be supported by affidavits or other documentary evidence. Any motion to reopen must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reopen, except that failure to file before this period expires may be excused in the discretion of the Service where it is demonstrated that the delay was reasonable and beyond the control of the applicant or petitioner. Id.

Any motion must be filed with the office which originally decided your case along with a fee of \$110 as required under 8 C.F.R. 103.7.

FOR THE ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER,
EXAMINATIONS

Myra L. Roseberg
for Robert P. Wiemann, Director
Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The immigrant visa petition was denied by the Director, California Service Center, and is now before the Associate Commissioner for Examinations on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed.

The petitioner is a church. It seeks classification of the beneficiary as a special immigrant minister pursuant to section 203(b)(4) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the "Act"), 8 U.S.C. 1153(b)(4), in order to employ him as its pastor at a salary of \$2,000 per month.

The director denied the petition finding that the petitioner failed to establish the required denominational affiliation between the petitioner and the beneficiary's foreign church.

On appeal, counsel for the petitioner explained that the denomination, the Living Soul Church, is an independent Christian denomination established in Korea in 1963. It was further explained that the petitioner is a new member church of that denomination. Additional documentation was submitted.

Section 203(b)(4) of the Act provides classification to qualified special immigrant religious workers as described in section 101(a)(27)(C) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(27)(C), which pertains to an immigrant who:

- (i) for at least 2 years immediately preceding the time of application for admission, has been a member of a religious denomination having a bona fide nonprofit, religious organization in the United States;

- (ii) seeks to enter the United States--

- (I) solely for the purpose of carrying on the vocation of a minister of that religious denomination,

- (II) before October 1, 2003, in order to work for the organization at the request of the organization in a professional capacity in a religious vocation or occupation, or

- (III) before October 1, 2003, in order to work for the organization (or for a bona fide organization which is affiliated with the religious denomination and is exempt from taxation as an organization described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Code of 1986) at the request of the organization in a religious vocation or occupation; and

- (iii) has been carrying on such vocation, professional work, or other work continuously for at least the 2-year period described in clause (i).

The petitioner in this matter is a church claiming a congregation of approximately 300 members. The beneficiary is a native and citizen of Korea currently residing in that country and is stated to be a minister in the Church of the Living Soul denomination.

In order to establish eligibility for classification as a special immigrant minister, the petitioner must satisfy several eligibility requirements. The two-year denominational membership provision of 8 C.F.R. 204.5(m)(3)(ii)(A) is one of those requirements. After a review of the evidence submitted by counsel, it may be concluded that the director's concerns have been overcome. However, the record reveals additional deficiencies and the petition may not be approved.

A petitioner also must establish that the alien beneficiary is qualified as a minister as defined in these proceedings.

8 C.F.R. 204.5(m)(3) states, in pertinent part, that each petition for a religious worker must be accompanied by:

(ii) A letter from an authorized official of the religious organization in the United States which (as applicable to the particular alien) establishes:

(B) That, if the alien is a minister, he or she has authorization to conduct religious worship and to perform other duties usually performed by authorized members of the clergy, including a detailed description of such authorized duties. In appropriate cases, the certificate of ordination or authorization may be requested.

8 C.F.R. 204.5(m)(2) states, in pertinent part, that:

Minister means an individual duly authorized by a recognized religious denomination to conduct religious worship and to perform other duties usually performed by authorized members of the clergy of that religion. In all cases, there must be a reasonable connection between the activities performed and the religious calling of the minister. The term does not include a lay preacher not authorized to perform such duties.

In this case, the petitioner has not explained the standards required to be recognized as a minister in the denomination or shown that the beneficiary has satisfied such standards. It is noted that simply producing documents purported to be certificates of ordination, which are not based on theological training or education, is not proof that an alien is entitled to perform the duties of a minister. Matter of Rhee, 16 I&N Dec. 607 (BIA 1978). As noted in the regulations, a lay preacher is not considered a minister for the purpose of special immigrant classification. Accordingly, the petitioner has failed to establish that the beneficiary is a qualified minister.

A petitioner also must establish that the alien beneficiary was continuously carrying on the vocation of a minister for at least the two years preceding the filing of the petition.

8 C.F.R. 204.5(m)(1) states, in pertinent part, that:

All three types of religious workers must have been performing the vocation, professional work, or other work continuously (either abroad or in the United States) for at least the two-year period immediately preceding the filing of the petition.

In the case of special immigrant ministers, the alien must have been engaged solely as a minister of the religious denomination for the two-year period in order to qualify for the benefit sought and must intend to be engaged solely in the work of a minister of religion. Matter of Faith Assembly Church, 19 I&N 391 (Comm. 1986).

The petition was filed on January 7, 1999. Therefore, the petitioner must establish that the beneficiary had been continuously and solely carrying on the vocation of a minister of religion since at least January 7, 1997.

In this case, the petitioner submitted a "certificate of employment history" for the beneficiary reflecting that from October 1996 to March 1999 the beneficiary was the "Director of the Department of Education and Department of Students" for an unidentified entity, presumably an educational institution. Accordingly, even if the beneficiary was a qualified minister during the two-year qualifying period, he was not engaged in that vocation "solely" as required. For this reason as well, the petition may not be approved.

A petitioner also must demonstrate its ability to pay the proffered wage.

8 C.F.R. 204.5(g)(2) states, in pertinent part, that:

Any petition filed by or for an employment-based immigrant which requires an offer of employment must be accompanied by evidence that the prospective United States employer has the ability to pay the wage. The petitioner must demonstrate this ability at the time the priority date is established and continuing until the beneficiary obtains lawful permanent residence. Evidence of this ability shall be either in the form of annual reports, federal tax returns, or audited financial statements.

The petitioner has not furnished the church's annual reports, federal tax returns, or audited financial statements. Therefore, the petitioner has not satisfied the documentary requirement of this provision.

The petitioner submitted documentation indicating that the beneficiary would be partly or wholly supported by the parent organization in Korea. However, the regulation clearly requires the United States employer to have the ability to pay the proffered wage.

The petitioner also must demonstrate that a qualifying job offer has been tendered.

8 C.F.R. 204.5(m) (4) states, in pertinent part, that:

Job offer. The letter from the authorized official of the religious organization in the United States must state how the alien will be solely carrying on the vocation of a minister, or how the alien will be paid or remunerated if the alien will work in a professional capacity or in other religious work. The documentation should clearly indicate that the alien will not be solely dependent on supplemental employment or the solicitation of funds for support.

In this case, the petitioner has not established that the beneficiary would be solely engaged in the vocation of a minister in the United States. Therefore, it has not tendered a qualifying job offer.

The burden of proof in these proceedings rests solely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. 1361. Here, the petitioner has not sustained that burden.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.